

# Diaphragm

## How the diaphragm works:

The diaphragm is a round rubber cup with a stiff rim. It is used with a special gel or cream that contains a spermicide (a substance that kills sperm). You insert the diaphragm and spermicide together into your vagina and over your cervix to keep sperm from entering your uterus.

The diaphragm comes in different types and many sizes. You must be fitted for a diaphragm by a trained doctor or health provider.

How to use the diaphragm:

- Empty your bladder (pee) and wash your hands.
- Squeeze about a tablespoon of spermicidal gel into the diaphragm cup and smear it around the rim.
- Insert the diaphragm into your vagina as instructed when it was fitted. The cup must cover the cervix. Insert your finger into your vagina to check that the diaphragm is in place.
- The diaphragm can be inserted into the vagina up to 6 hours before sexual intercourse. It is effective immediately. If it is 6 hours or more, add an extra applicator



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of spermicidal gel. Leave the diaphragm in place for 6 hours after sex but not longer than a total of 24 hours. Do not douche with the diaphragm in place.

- If you have sex more than once, add more spermicidal gel into your vagina each time.
- To remove the diaphragm, slip a finger into your vagina and under the rim and gently slide it out.
- Take good care of your diaphragm by washing it gently in warm water and mild soap. Rinse well, pat dry, dust with cornstarch and put back into its case.
- Check the diaphragm often for holes or weak spots, especially around the rim. Never use a diaphragm with a hole.
- Keep a supply of spermicidal gel on hand; check for an expiration date on each tube.

The diaphragm should be refitted if you gain or lose 10 pounds or more, if you have a birth or late trimester abortion, or pelvic surgery.

### **Effectiveness rates:**

If a diaphragm is used every time of sexual intercourse and is always used the correct way (perfect use), the effectiveness rate is as high as 94%. Because women do not always use the diaphragm every time or put it in incorrectly, the typical use effectiveness is 80% or lower; 20 women out of 100 could become pregnant within the first year of use.

### **Benefits of the diaphragm:**

It can be used only when needed, with very few side effects or major health risks. It can be put in before sex starts and still be effective up to 6 hours later.

### **Potential side effects or disadvantages:**

Some people are allergic to the latex rubber. Some people are allergic to the spermicidal gel or cream. If this happens, try another brand. Planning ahead is required. You must be comfortable with inserting and removing the diaphragm. No protection against STIs or HIV (AIDS).

### **Potential risks:**

Some women find that the diaphragm may cause bladder discomfort or an increase risk of bladder irritation or infections. If she has any pain or discomfort, she should see her doctor or health care provider.

### **Where can you get a diaphragm?**

Getting a diaphragm requires an exam, a fitting and a prescription from a qualified health care provider. When you are fitted for your diaphragm, it is important that your provider also offers teaching and some time for you to practice inserting and removing your diaphragm. Call your local family planning clinic for information.